

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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O 012110Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9750

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 6535

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SA PINT

SUBJECT: NATIONAL PARTY WINS LANDSLIDE IN SOUTH AFRICA

1. SUMMARY: VORSTER HAS WON THE MANDATE HE SOUGHT FROM THE WHITE POPULATION, BRINGING A GOOD PERCENTAGE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKERS INTO THE LAAGER AND DECIMINATING THE OPPOSITION. THE NATIONAL PARTY HAS THUS SIGNIFICANTLY BROADENED ITS BASE BUT ALSO BECOME MORE AMORPHUS AND POSSIBLY IN THE LONG TERM MORE SUBJECT TO FRAGMENTATION UNDER STREESS. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH FOUR SEATS STILL UNDECIDED, THE NATIONAL PARTY HAS WON A LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN THE NOV. 30 GENERAL
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ELECTIONS CAPTURING 65-70 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE AND ENLARGING ITS TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN THE LAST PARLIAMENT TO A LOPSIDED 131 TO 135 OUT OF 165. THE LIBERAL PFP WILL TAKE OVER AS THE OFFICAL OPPOSITION BUT WITH ONLY 17 OR 18 SEATS--THE LOWER FIGURE WOULD BE ONE LESS THAN ITS POSSESSED GOING INTO THE CONTEST. THE SUCCESSOR OF THE ONCE GOVERNING UNITED PARTY, THE NEW

REPUBLIC PARTY (NRP), WILL PROBABLY BE REDUCED TO 10 SEATS, WHILE THE RIGHT-WING REMNANT OF THE UP, THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY PICKED UP THREE WITH THE SUPPORT OF NP VOTERS WHO HAD NO NATIONALIST CANDIDATE IN THE CONSTITUENCIES. THE EXTREMIST HNP PERFORMED EVEN WORSE THAN IN 1974 AND AGAIN FAILED TO GAIN A SEAT.

3. COMPARED WITH A 74 PERCENT TURNOUT IN 1974, IT APPEARS THAT BETWEEN 65-70 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS WENT TO THE POLLS YESTERDAY. THE SOMEWHAT REDUCED TURNOUT WAS DUE IN PART TO THE ELECTION BEING BASED ON THE 1973 VOTER ROLLS, GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT THERE WOULD BE NAT LANDSLIDE, AND DELIBERATE ABSTENTIONS, PARTICULARLY AMONG DISGRUNTLED AND CONFUSED EX-UP SUPPORTERS, A SPLIT OPPOSITION VOTE CONTRIBUTED TO NATIONALIST VICTORIES IN THREE CONSTITUENCIES, FEWER THAN HAD BEEN EXPECTED.

4. PRIME MINISTER VORSTER TERMED THE NAT VICTORY AN "AVALANCHE". A SHOW OF WHITE SOLIDARITY WAS IMPORTANT TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT IN TERMS OF BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN AUDIENCES. IN A RADIO INTERVIEW, VORSTER SAID THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTION WERE AN ANSWER TO FOREIGN PRESSURES ON SOUTH AFRICA. WHEN ASKED, HE SAID HE EXPECTED SUCH PRESSURES TO INCREASE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF HIS SUCCESS.

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5. VORSTER AND HIS NATIONALIST COLLEAGUES CAME CLOSE TO DECIMINATING THE ALREADY WEAK OPPOSITION, BOTH LIBERAL AND EXTREME RIGHT-WING, ALTHOUGH THE PFP EMERGED AS THE NEW OFFICIAL OPPOSITION, VORSTER MUST BE QUITE SATISFIED WITH ITS FAILURE TO MAKE ANY GAINS. THE POLL IS ALSO A PERSONAL VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN VORSTER WHO HAS RAISED THE NATIONAL PARTY TO A NEW ELECTORAL PEAK AND MORE THAN MADE UP FOR THE SLIGHT SLIPPAGE WHICH OCCUREED UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP IN THE 1974 ELECTIONS. INDEED, THIS MAY BE THE ZENITH OF THE NATIONAL PARTY.

6. THE NP HAS SIGNIFICANTLY WIDENED ITS BASE WITHIN THE WHITE POPULATION, WHICH CLEARLY GAVE VORSTER A MUCH STRENGTHENED MANDATE. MOST OF THE FEW AFRIKANERS IN THE OLD UP VERY LIKELY FLED INTO THE LAAGER, AND LOCAL POLITICAL SCIENTISTS ESTIMATE THE THE NATIONAL PARTY NOW HAS THE SUPPORT OF OVER 90 PERCENT OF AFRIKANERS. BUT IT IS ALSO TENTATIVELY CALCULATED THAT ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING VOTERS SUPPORTED THE NP AS COMPARED TO ROUGHLY 15 PERCENT IN THE 1974 POLL. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE NP WILL THUS MATURE FROM A PARTY OF AFRIKANER NATIONALISM TO ONE OF WHITE NATIONALISM AND THAT

THIS COULD HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE PARTY. OTHERS BELIEVE THAT THE NP IS ONLY CO-OPTING THE CONSERVATIVE ENGLISH AND THAT THE INTERESTS OF AFRIKANERDOM WILL REMAIN PARAMOUNT IN THE PARTY.

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7. NEVERTHELESS THE ELECTION VICTORY WILL ADD SOME STRENGTH TO THE VERLIGTE (LIBERAL) ELEMENT IN THE NAT PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS. ALL OF THE NEW NAT SEATS ARE IN FORMER UP HELD CONSTITUENCIES (INCLUDING SOME THAT HAD SWITCHED TO THE PFP), WHICH HAVE LARGE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMPONENTS. MANY OF THE NEW NAT MP'S IN THESE AREAS ARE CONSIDERED LIBERAL IN THE NP CONTEXT. THE PARTY WILL THUS EMBRACE A WIDER POLITICAL SPECTRUM THAN IN THE PAST, EXTENDING FROM THE HIGHLY VERKRAMPTE TO A NUMBER OF OUTSPOKEN VERLIGTES. THIS COULD RENDER THE PARTY MORE AMORPHOUS AND POSSIBLY MORE SUBJECT IN THE LONG TERM TO FRAGMENTATION UNDER STRESS.

8. VERLIGTE CABINET MINSTERS SUCH AS PIET KOORNHOF AND
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AFRIKANER INTELLECTUALS, INCLUDING THE EDITORS OF ALL MAJOR AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPERS, SAY PRIVATELY THAT SUCH AN INPUT OF VERLIGTE MP'S AND THE PARTY'S NEW BROAD BASE OF POPULAR SUPPORT WILL ENABLE VORSTER TO MOVE AHEAD WITH IMPORTANT REFORMS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT. BUT EVEN WITHIN THIS RESTRICTED FRAMEWORK, CHANGES DESIRED BY THE VERLIGTES WILL BE STOUTLY RESISTED BY THE RIGHT WING OF THE PARTY. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER VORSTER WILL IN FACT BE WILLING TO RISK ALIENATING THIS WING.

9. THE ELECTION RELEGATED THE NRP TO PROVINCIAL STATUS, WITH SCARCELY ANY NATIONAL POTENTIAL. ONLY ONE OF ITS 10 SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES COMES FROM A CONSTITUENCY OUTSIDE NATAL, THE BULK OF THE NRP'S POPULAR VOTE (ABOUT 10 PERCENT) BEING LIMITED TO THAT PROVINCE. THE PARTY LEADER, RADCLYFFE CADMAN, AS WELL AS THE PARTY'S FOUR PROVINCIAL CHIEFS, LOST THEIR RACES. THE NRP RETAINED MUCH LESS THAN HALF OF THE OLD UP VOTE. ONE EARLY ESTIMATE IS THAT 28 PERCENT OF THE FORMER UP VOTE WENT TO THE NP AND 27 PERCENT TO THE PFP, WITH THE NRP AND THE SAP TAKING THE REMAINDER. MOST OF THE SUCCESSFUL NRP PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES ARE RELATIVELY CONSERVATIVE. THE PARTY RETAINED CONTROL OF THE NATAL PROVINCIAL COUNCIL, WINNING 12 SEATS TO 8 FOR THE NP.

10. THE PFP'S 17. PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE REPRESENTS THE HARD CORE OF THE WHITE POPULATION THAT IS PREPARED TO SCRAP THE PRESENT APARTHEID SYSTEM AND NEGOTIATE A NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURE WITH BLACKS. THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THIS CORE IS ENGLISH-SPEAKING AND IS CENTERED IN THE SUBURBS OF JOHANNESBURG AND CAPE TOWN. THE PARTY WON ONLY ONE SEAT OUTSIDE THESE URBAN AREAS--I.E., IN NATAL.

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11. DESPITE THE SIGNIFICANT SHIFT OF ENGLISH-SPEAKERS TO THE NP, THE RESULTS VERY LIKELY DO NOT REPRESENT A MAJOR ALTERATION OF THE IDEOLOGICAL BALANCE IN WHITE SOUTH AFRICA. MOST OF THE FORMER UP MEMBERS WHO SHIFTED TO THE NATIONAL PARTY WERE CONSERVATIVE AND HAD SUPPORTED THE UP OUT OF FAMILY OR ETHNIC TRADITION. AND AN UNKNOWN NUMBER SWITCHED TO THE NATIONALISTS, NOT NECESSARILY BECAUSE OF A STRONG IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT TO APARTHEID OR SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT, BUT BECAUSE OF THE SEIGE PSYCHOLOGY AND THEIR PERCEIVED NEED TO RALLY AROUND A STRONG GOVERNMENT.

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